

“MOOSELOOK” SALMON NEED YOUR HELP!!!

Attention fishermen! “Mooselookmeguntic Lake landlocked salmon need your help!” reads a message from the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. “There is currently an overabundance of landlocked salmon in Mooselookmeguntic Lake. This has led to a decline in the growth rates and quality of salmon available to anglers. Reducing numbers of salmon, particularly those between 12 and 16 inches, is necessary to restore the lake's forage (smelts) to a level that can support better growth of salmon. Because this salmon fishery is supported entirely by natural reproduction, harvest by anglers is our only tool for reducing the number of salmon and restoring a reasonable balance between them and smelts. Since 2006, additional salmon harvest has been encouraged with a 12” minimum and a 3 fish daily bag limit. This has worked to prevent further decline in the quality of salmon in Mooselookmeguntic Lake, but more harvest must occur if dramatic improvements are to be realized.”

This important message continues: “Increasing the salmon harvest should, over time, improve the average size of salmon available to anglers, and enhance the value of sport fisheries in the lake and its tributaries, including the Kennebago River. Lower salmon abundance should also benefit the lake's very special wild brook trout population through reduced competition and improved forage. For these reasons, the MDIF&W enthusiastically supports the newly formed Mooselookmeguntic Salmon Enhancement Program.” The MSEP is an initiative recently adopted by a group of guides, camp owners, and recreational fishermen supported by the Rangeley Region Guides' & Sportsmens' Assoc. (RRG&SA), Sportsman's Alliance of Maine (SAM), Rangeley Lakes Chamber of Commerce. Who are dedicated to improving the quality of landlocked salmon fishing in Mooselookmeguntic Lake.

Please help us achieve this objective. As part of the Mooselookmeguntic Salmon Enhancement Program, the community is holding a weekend salmon fishing event, the “Mooselook” Salmon Initiative on June 11, 12, 13 on Mooselookmeguntic Lake. The object is to catch and remove as many legal salmon as possible. Existing length and bag limit regulations will still be in effect. Cook these tasty fish up for yourself or donate them to available representatives of the local food bank.

On the weekend of the event you can register on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday at Rivers Edge Sports Shop in Oquossoc or at two public launch ramps on Mooselookmeguntic Lake – Haines Landing in Oquossoc, and the State launch at the South end of the lake. Registration is free and you will receive a packet of informational material including complimentary memberships to the RRG&SA and SAM, coupons, gift certificates, and more from the Rangeley area. Fisheries biologists will be at the launching ramps to

record the number of fish caught and record significant biological data. They will also collect any unwanted salmon to be delivered to local food banks, etc.

The landlocked salmon has been one of Maine's most highly prized sport fish and Mooselookmeguntic Lake has been one of the premier places to catch this game fish for over 125 years. Landlocked salmon are closely related to Atlantic salmon. Genetic evidence shows that landlocked salmon and sea run salmon have a common ancestry. Landlocked salmon separated from Atlantic salmon following the last glacial retreat 10,000 years ago. Several Maine lakes associated with major river systems contained native landlocked salmon. The Rangeley Lakes did not have native landlocked salmon.

Because of its reputation as a hard fighting game fish, landlocked salmon were one of the first fish species to be stocked to create new sport fishing opportunities. They were stocked into the the Rangeley Lakes in 1875. Seven years later in 1882, ten to twelve pound salmon were observed in the Rangeley River. The salmon introduced to Mooselookmeguntic Lake thrived due to its favorable lake characteristics and its ideal spawning stream, the Kennebago River. The salmon in Mooselookmeguntic became a self sustaining or wild population which continues today.

Mooselookmeguntic salmon spawn in October and November, predominantly in the Kennebago River. The eggs lie in the red in about 18 inches of water and under 4 to 12 inches of gravel. The eggs hatch in late May and early June. Like Atlantic salmon, landlocked salmon live to spawn multiple times unlike the Pacific salmon which die shortly after spawning. Wild salmon spawning runs are generally comprised of fish 2 to 7 years old. In Mooselookmeguntic Lake significant numbers of fish 7 years and up are known to join in the spawning run. The newly hatched salmon spend one to two years in their birth stream before they leave for the lake. When they first enter the lake, Mooselookmeguntic salmon are just 4.5 inches long, less than the State average length of 5.9 inches. Once in the lake the young salmon experience a remarkable growth spurt.

Wild salmon experience greater variations in growth rates year to year than hatchery raised stocked fish. These fluctuating growth rates are associated with variations in total smelt populations. Wild salmon are mostly slower growing, weigh less for their age, and are less robust than hatchery salmon. This accounts for Rangeley Lake with a combination of wild and stocked fish, having faster growing and larger salmon by age group. Mooselookmeguntic, however, produces larger wild brook trout than Rangeley Lake. Smelt are the principal food of salmon and also an important food source of brook trout. Salmon rely almost entirely on smelt during the winter with insects a major food source in spring and particularly the fall. Fish other than smelt compromise very little of the salmon diet in contrast to brook trout which feed on minnows and other fish

as well as smelt.

The greater variation in growth rates of wild salmon makes it more difficult for fisheries and biologists to control size and populations of fish. In lakes where salmon are stocked, the biologist can adjust the number of fish stocked to the available smelt population. In Mooselookmeguntic where there is only a wild population of salmon, there is no means of controlling the number of salmon successfully completing their stay in the spawning stream and entering the lake. In years favorable to survival of salmon fry. With good stream flow and ideal temperatures. Greater numbers of salmon successfully reach the lake. With greater numbers of salmon feeding on smelt, the smelt numbers go down with the result that salmon growth rates also go down. Conversely the opposite could hold true where poor spawning results produce less fish entering the lake resulting in more available smelt and growth rates go up.

Over the past several years Mooselookmeguntic has experienced very good conditions for producing young salmon as well as for brook trout. The Kennebago River is an excellent salmon and brook trout nursery and recently it has experienced high water flows in Spring and Fall and favorable temperatures. It is probable that these conditions have produce higher numbers of young salmon entering Mooselookmeguntic Lake and resulted in lower than normal growth rates in the lake. The choice then to raise growth rates would be to increase the number of smelt or decrease the number of salmon. The MDIF&W has chosen to reduce the number of salmon to increase growth rates.

The Mooselookmeguntic Salmon Enhancement Program is the community's initiative to accomplish the goal of reducing salmon numbers. Come out and give us a hand in this important endeavor. These are good sized fish, great sport, and excellent pan fried! It should be a fun weekend with a lot of salmon caught.

For more information visit www.rangeleyguidesandsportsmen.org
or call Rivers Edge Sports 864-5582